

Working With Difficult People

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Introduction

- Welcome
- Agenda and Timetable
- Something About Mary

Goals

- Have fun!
- Explain how we may come to label others as difficult.
- Demonstrate communication techniques to transform and transcend difficulties.

Topics

- Responses to People as Difficult: Our Biases and Back-Up Behaviors
- Working with Difficult People: Listen, Learn, and Leverage Encounters

Is this a Difficult Person?



Dealing with Difficulties - Our Biases

- Our perceptions of others are based on
 - their verbal and nonverbal behaviors
 - past interactions, with them and with others that remind us of them
 - our own biases and beliefs
- Unconscious biases skew our perceptions of others - may make us think of them as “difficult”

Common Biases

- Double standard
- Seeing what you want to see
- Overconfidence

Double Standard

- When we behave badly, we often blame external events.

“Work was stressful, so I left early.”

- When others behave in the same way, we often believe that they are at fault.

“Steve left early - he is such a slacker.”

Double Standard, 2

Us

- Deserving of what we get
- Strategic
- Long term perspective
- See the big picture
- Act in organization's best interests
- Reasonable
- Easy to deal with

Them

Free rider
Opportunistic
Short term thinker
Narrow vision
Out for themselves

Stubborn
Difficult

Seeing What You Want To See

- Called the “confirmation bias” by social scientists.
- We tend to seek and interpret new information that confirms our preconceptions while avoiding information and interpretations that contradict prior beliefs.

"I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabrics of their life." Tolstoy

Overconfidence

- Confidence is good.
- But we often overestimate our own abilities, including our ability to remember details and analyze situations.

Test Yourself

You will have ten seconds to count all the
Fs in a passage. Good luck!

**Films are flicks that are produced
after years of personal effort,
and of unique knowledge, and
frankly, of hard work and
indefatigable spirit.**



How many Fs did you find?

In other words . . .

It can be hard to see another's point of view, admit we were wrong, or be open to different sides of an issue, especially when we believe what we do or know is right.

A difficult person—or a person
in a difficult situation?



Dealing with Difficulties - Our Behaviors

- When we are under stress or working with difficult people, “back-up behaviors” often kick in
- These are similar to biases, because often unconscious/hidden

Back-up Behaviors

- **Avoiding**
 - “I don’t want to talk about it now.”
- **Acquiescing**
 - “I give up; we’ll do it your way (until I get the chance to do it my way!)”
- **Attacking**
 - “This is ridiculous (you, your project, your idea)! What are you thinking?”
- **Autocratic**
 - “That’s the completely wrong solution all round. The facts speak for themselves.”

Benefits of Identifying Biases and Back-Up Behaviors

- Helps us to separate the people from the problem.
- Encourages us to adopt consensus-based methods of gathering information and making decisions
- Makes long-term implementation easier and more successful.

10-Minute Break 😊

Community Involvement

- Community involvement seeks to identify and include all stakeholders.
 - Everybody has a role to play
 - Everybody has biases
- What can we do to transcend biases and transform encounters into positive, mutually beneficial interactions?

Thinking that helps

- Be open
- Manage your internal judging voice
- Seek to understand
- Learn to listen

Learning to Listen Actively

- Listening stances
 - Be aware of yourself
 - Put yourself in their shoes
 - Become an observer

Typical Thoughts While Listening

- Judging
- Preparing our response
- Daydreaming

Active Listening Skills

Paraphrase

Restate what you heard the other person say without necessarily agreeing.

Inquire

Test your understanding by asking open-ended questions.

Acknowledge

Listen for the underlying feelings of the other person and reflect them back.

Active Listening Stance

Listening with the intent to understand
another's point of view . . .

. . . rather than what we intend to say
next.

Active Listening Experiment

I need two volunteers!

Active Listening Exercise--Step 1

Pair up with someone.

Active Listening Exercise--Step 2

Designate one person the “Listener” and the other the “Speaker.”

Active Listening Exercise--Step 3

Listener: Think of a widely-known public issue about which you have a strong opinion (for example, Iraq, presidential politics, gun control, abortion, etc.).

Listener: Share with the speaker what your issue is and your viewpoint about it.

Active Listening Exercise--Step 4

Speaker: You are now going to begin a conversation where you adopt the *opposite viewpoint of the Listener*.

Listener: In this conversation, *you can only do one thing—listen actively*.

That means you can only *paraphrase, acknowledge, or inquire*.

Active Listening Skills

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Acknowledge

Listen for the underlying feelings of the other person and reflect them back.

Active Listening Exercise--Step 5

Speaker: Give feedback/coaching to the *Listener*

What did the *Listener* do that made you feel heard?

What did the *Listener* do that made you feel less heard or annoyed?

Active Listening Exercise--Step 6

1. Listener: Think of an issue and share your view.
2. Speaker: State the opposite view.
3. Listener: Paraphrase, acknowledge, inquire.
4. Speaker: Give feedback. How well did the listener listen?
5. Switch Listener and Speaker roles.

Applying Active Listening in Small Group Meetings

- Listen to group members' perspectives with active listening skills.
- Check understanding to establish clarity, find common ground, and strengthen group cohesion and cooperation.
- Summarize and gain agreement on similarities and differences.
- Move to problem-solving, if appropriate.

Check for Understanding

Remember to use

- *"Could you tell me what you heard me say"*

Listen

- Then before stating your own position, summarize what you heard, including meaning and feeling, until the speaker is satisfied you understand.

Active Listening Benefits

- Get what you want for reasons you will not regret later.
- Make conscious choices about how you will respond, whether you get what you want or not.
- Create a problem-solving environment that incorporates everyone's needs, values, and perspectives.

Summary

- Review course topics and goals.
- Identify ways to apply training.
- Gather course evaluation/feedback.

For More Information

- Steven Beckler, James Olson, Elizabeth Wiggins, *Social Psychology ALIVE* (2006).
- Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School, *Negotiation Skills for Senior Executives* (2003).
- Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication* (2nd Edition, 2003).
- The University of Texas at Austin Quality Center, *Handbook for Facilitators* (1998).
- Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patten, *Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (2nd ed., 1991).
- John Lawyer and Neil Katz, *Communication Skills for Ministry* (1985).
- Wilson Learning Corporation, *Social Styles Series*.